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Editorials

Gun permit process needs tightening

There is a scene that has been played out repeatedly in old Western movies. Someone rides into town, the sheriff approaches, and says, "I'll take your gun and keep it in my office until you're ready to leave. I don't want gunfights in my town."

In real-life San Bernardino County of 1988, Sheriff Floyd Tidwell follows a different script, one that is troubling.

While most other California law enforcement officials in urban areas go to some lengths to verify an applicant's need for a concealed-weapon permit, placing the burden of proof upon the applicant, Tidwell turns that process on its head.

Generally under his system, a person's request is presumed to be a sufficient reason to issue a permit.

More than 1,000 people have such annual permits in San Bernardino County — 84 for every 100,000 residents. (Of those, 770 were issued by Tidwell, the rest by local police chiefs.)

By contrast, in neighboring Riverside County, which shares many of our characteristics, there are only 11.9 permits per 100,000 residents. The number of permits is 8.8, 4.3 and 1.5 per 100,000 in Santa Clara, Los Angeles and San Francisco counties respectively.

Clearly, Tidwell's philosophy is far more open-handed than those of sheriffs in most other urban counties.

In addition, many of Tidwell's 1,114 special deputies are given three-year permits — permits that are restricted by law to peace officers.

There seems to be a wide disparity in the way the law is interpreted.

In most jurisdictions, for the purpose of issuing these permits, a peace officer is considered to be someone who is at least a police reservist with more than 200 hours of training. In most places, "special deputy" is only an honorary title that does not make a person a police officer.

The vast differences in the way our concealed-weapon permit laws are interpreted and carried out suggest that the Legislature should make these laws far more precise. Unless that is done, the law is meaningless.

The fact, too, that most of California's urban-area sheriffs and police chiefs are much more restrictive than Tidwell in issuing concealed-weapon permits, should be cause for this county's citizens to wonder about Tidwell's judgment.

It is the general wisdom of the law-enforcement community that an overabundance of concealed-weapon permits is more likely to cause trouble than to lead to orderly conditions.

When one official departs from that philosophy, voters should be concerned about that official's prudence.



Ellen Goodman

Suffering tradition attacks

She is suffering from an impulse to make orange marmalade. It may seem usually done. She has the jelly glasses from two years ago to prove that.

My friend thinks of her marmalade fancy as a tradition attack, although the recipe is most assuredly not from her family lineage, nor is it in her palate. Although she is most assuredly not a traditional woman.

But she regards this moment, or so she says, as part of a trend, a surge in the number and duration of the tradition attacks in herself and the people we both know. Among the most modern of them, there seems to be a longing for the comfort of what is old.

This is a trend that can be seen in the magazine she opens for me, the kind that is geared to homes and houses. She seems that come to eye repeatedly are Edwardian or Victorian, or even Georgian. They are variations of the patterns inscribed on sheets and wallpaper. Furnishings for an English ancestral home where Alastair Cooke might be found in a chair warmed by wassail and a plaid lap robe.

In all probability, the tables in the magazines were contrived by some big food stylist in midtown Manhattan, dressed to kill in black leather, who played the traditional fancy and arranged the room was probably captured by an equally big photographer in jeans who shot the food feast in high-speed color.

But real-life homes and tables are also full of such imagery and such contradictions. This year there will be electrons to under many a Dickensian Christmas tree. A compact disc will play Christmas carols. A microwave oven will make at least one fruitcake. Or one batch of marmalade.

It occurs to both of us that the most conversation now about nesting, as if the honing instinct, once extinct, had mysteriously reappeared among our national species. It is true that young couples are going to extraordinary lengths to own a home. The irony is that more of them now work outside their houses just to pay for those houses.

Today, "lived-in" is a look rather than a reality. Families may actually have less time under their own roofs than any previous generation. At times it seems that homes are environments we create for the lives we don't actually lead because we aren't in them. They build family rooms for small families and elaborate kitchens for people who eat fewer, faster meals in them.

Like my friend the marmalade maker, many of us work long hours in contemporary offices behind a modular desk, in Bauhaus buildings with windows that don't open, in artificial workspaces with plants that are chosen for their ability to live without sunlight. While we are there, our homes sit like empty stage sets waiting for us to come back and act on them.

It is possible that the less time we spend there, the more important they are as our theater. Our interiors may have come to represent something, a fantasy life about home and family, a place out of place with our real modern lives. This may be especially true during that elaborate annual short-run production called the holidays.

Americans have always lived in two time zones: now and then. But the gap between present and past is greater for us now. People who work in hi-tech environments and eat out brown are modest yearning for comfort furniture and comfort food — for the traditional radiation even if our real traditions go back to Krakow instead of Kent.

Maybe that gap is why there's a passion to put a traditional ambiance around modern world. For a wood-burning fireplace in the midst of central heating. For a Victorian print on our no-iron sheets. It may even be why a thoroughly modern woman with two serious suits and a lap-top computer is at this moment still thinking about jars of orange marmalade. Goodman is a Boston Globe columnist.

Future prosperity requires planning

The California Legislature reconvened Monday and more or less took up where it left off three months ago, prosecuted by internal power struggles.

Willie Brown was re-elected as speaker of the Assembly and David Roberti as president pro tempore of the Senate, signaling a continuation of the Capitol's status quo, even in light of widespread public dissatisfaction with the Legislature and a still-developing FBI investigation into Capitol corruption.

Brown's re-election notwithstanding, there were still squabbles within both party caucuses which bubbled to the surface, providing grist for the news mills to grind into accounts of the opening ceremonies.

But a more important, if largely overlooked, event occurred in the Capitol on Monday.

The Legislature's own fiscal adviser, the legislative analyst's office, delivered to lawmakers a thoughtful report on the state of California's economy.

It was politely worded. But between the lines, the report delivered a serious warning to legislators and others responsible for public policy in California: the economy, while humming along nicely now, has some potential problems that should be addressed before they develop into full-blown crises.

What's occurred in California during the last decade is a true economic miracle that puts to shame the "Massachusetts miracle" claimed by its governor, Michael Dukakis, when he was running for president.

California has absorbed more than four million new persons into its economy and lowered unem-



Dan Walters

ployment to near-record lows. As the gateway to the Pacific Rim, California has seen its trade and service sectors explode with activity, even as manufacturing has somewhat stagnated. And California's employment is rapidly dispersing out of the central cities and into the sun belt of rapidly growing suburbs.

That very growth, both of population and economic activity, has sparked an anti-growth reaction in heavily impacted communities.

The potential impediments to continued prosperity for California, as listed in the legislative analyst's report, include transportation gridlock, inadequate water supply, strains on such infrastructure facilities as schools, trash disposal sites, sewage treatment plants, inadequate training for potential workers, high housing costs, lifestyle degradation, and limits on taxes and spending that retard government's ability to respond to the other needs.

Take, for example, labor force trends. As baby boomers begin retiring out of the California work force in two decades, there are serious potential shortages of trainable labor because of high dropout rates among blacks and Hispanic youngsters who are growing portions of the state's population.

We could, ironically, have a burgeoning population and a labor shortage co-existing side by side unless the public schools do a

much-better job of dealing with non-Anglo youngsters.

"California faces an imposing task in meeting the... challenges to the state's economic future," the analyst's office told the Legislature. And while some steps have been taken, "generally speaking... despite the importance and urgency of the challenges at hand, relatively little has been done thus far to address them."

The analyst's office is not the first authority to recognize the complexity of policy issues facing California. There's been a veritable flood of reports from public and private groups in the last year, all of which outline in inescapable detail what's needed to be done.

Nor is it the first to note that the lead times for dealing with these issues is not long and thus the need for rapid action is great.

Doing something to deal with the aforementioned potential labor shortage in 2010, for example, would require radical change in the public education system within the next two or three years.

"Regardless of the exact actions eventually undertaken, one thing is clear — because California is rapidly urbanizing and undergoing so many other significant changes, now is the time for making and implementing plans for accommodating the state's future economic growth," the report concluded. "The sooner and more effectively this job is undertaken, the better will be California's future economic performance, living standards and overall quality."

Against those stakes, the political games in the Capitol look pretty petty, don't they? Walters is a McClatchy News Service columnist.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Harsh drug law

I am appalled that The Sun supports the Federal Penitentiary Law which authorizes police to seize and sell the vehicle of anyone merely suspected of transporting illegal drugs.

As you point out in your Nov. 26 editorial, suspects can lose their vehicles even if they are subsequently found innocent of any wrongdoing. Your editorial regrets the "unnecessary" law, but shows no further concern for such drastic consequences of being wrongly accused.

Having recently produced a public television documentary about the gang-drug problem in Bialto, I am well aware of the devastation that drugs are causing, and I appreciate the difficulties police have in making a case against people who are often involved with drugs. However, that is no excuse to lose aside due process of law.

The potential for injustice is tremendous when we ask police officers on the street to assume functions that properly belong to the courts.

Suspicion is a subjective and error-prone state of mind, and should not be used to justify the confiscation of anyone's property. Furthermore, by providing so much arbitrary police power, so little judicial oversight and such huge financial interests, the forfeiture law is a recipe for corruption.

The drug problem is serious, but it should not make us abandon our basic constitutional freedoms in a fit of hysteria, the way we did during the McCarthy era of the 1950s. I hope The Sun will look more closely at the implications of the forfeiture law.

PETER COORADOT, Redlands

Knife at school

Referring to the Nov. 28 article "Angry mom sees expulsion as snafu son in Catch-22," my reaction is, "give me a break."

Reporter Pamela Fitzsimmons was way out of line with this sob sister story about a "poor little student who just happened to pick up a knife he claims he found at school, and got caught with it."

School is no place for knives or any other weapon. To make the schools a place of learning and not a place any of the students or teachers need to be concerned about their safety, the rules must be severe and be enforced. A found knife can kill or maim someone just as easily as one brought to school on purpose.

The student, Jaime Banelos, needs to learn a good lesson from this. In the real world people will not and need not put up with the dangerous actions such as possession of a knife in school. Fitzsimmons and Jaime's mother need to get it in their thick skulls that they are not helping "poor little Jaime" by not making him face the consequences of his actions.

OWEN S. KRAMER, Redlands

Pedaling jerks

I was interested in James King's letter complaining about the abrogation of the rights of bicyclists like himself.

I also am a cycling enthusiast, but I must point out another side to things. What about the cyclists who run stop signs, ride on sidewalks, ignore traffic lights, and make unsignaled turns?

Their attitude while committing these violations is one of petty arrogance. It is as if their helmets and funny black shorts give them a " yuppie dispensation" to obey traffic laws one minute, but then ignore them when convenient.

If cyclists truly want to be treated with the same respect as other vehicles on the road, I suggest they obey the same traffic laws as other vehicles. Cycling is a wonderful pastime, and most of us try to be considerate. But fair is fair — there are as many jerks pedaling as there are driving.

JOHN MCCOTTER, Redlands

Cans buy food

I read a piece in the paper on the free food baskets in Bloomington, Nov. 22. There's no reason anyone should be going hungry in this community, and willing to get off your duff and work a little.

I work for a recycling company five days a week and my company is everywhere. Even if your children are small, go for a walk (really, it won't kill you) pick up some cans.

You'd be surprised how many people see you if you walk the same route everyday. They'll say, "You collect cans. I'll put mine out for you." They really do.

My regular customers come in every day and they make a pretty darn good living at it tax-free, and most of them don't have a car.

People come up to me every day and ask for money. I say "no." There is no reason for begging. There are cans out there. They're just too lazy to pick them up and bring them in.

The lady in the article said she was willing to commit a crime to get a Thanksgiving dinner for her children. That's downright stupid. I suppose her children were standing there when she said that — a real good example to set for children! I was on AFDC (welfare), and there were some pretty bad times, but I never even thought of committing a crime. If you're caught, you would happen to the children?

You're lucky now. We have all these recycling centers. When I was on welfare and saved cans, I didn't have a car and I had to find a way to get to San Bernardino from Bloomington to cash them in.

LINDA WILLIAMS, San Bernardino

Letters welcome

Letters can be on any subject of current interest. All letters must be signed. Please include your street address or Post Office box and a daytime telephone number. Address letters to: Voice of the People, The Sun, 398 N. St., San Bernardino, CA 92401.